

# Rethinking the Single Family Dwelling

“Zoning codes have long prohibited multifamily housing in single family districts, despite the benefits that such mixing might have in terms of equity which would allow people who cannot afford to purchase a house the chance to live in a larger number of areas. Older neighbourhoods that were built prior to the laws sometimes have a mixture of housing types, with small apartment buildings interspersed among single-family houses. Contrary to popular belief, many such neighbourhoods retain their attractiveness to homeowners, often being among the more desirable places to live (and to purchase a house) in a region.”

Lawrence Frank, *Health and Community Design* (2003)

Despite provincial policy objectives to plan for smaller, affordable and more efficient units in small town neighbourhoods, the large single family house remains the prototypical form of housing in small cities and towns. Provincial policy suggests that as planners look to the future, a more diverse selection of housing types and sizes will be required. Echoing this goal, the Owen Sound OP directs that the city must “provide and maintain a full range of housing, in terms of form, tenure and affordability, across the city’s neighbourhoods to meet current and future needs of residents.” (City of Owen Sound, 2006). Yet in most residential zones across the city smaller rental units are not available and current land use planning laws prohibit multi-unit dwellings in most zones, and resistance to change is strong.

A vacant lot in an existing single family residential zone could support a small apartment complex, with a physical profile smaller and more compact than most single family houses on the street. Can a multi-family house be designed to blend into an existing neighbourhood? Will planners re-evaluate the legitimacy of segregating apartment dwellers from home owners, and what do neighbours have to say about it? Are municipal councillors ready to accept change?

In keeping with the action research imperative of this study, and to test opportunities and obstacles to intensification in the current planning system, a viable development project on a lot adjacent to the author’s home became a vehicle for analysis. In this chapter a re-zoning application which challenges exclusive zoning policies is examined in detail, providing insight into the planning and development process, including interface with neighbours, housing advocacy groups, community leaders and funding agents. Although the project was not approved, it is hoped that the by initiating community dialogue about a viable alternate model, citizens and community leaders will begin to consider alternatives to the exclusivity of the single family neighbourhood for future dwelling types.



**Fig 2:1** Visions of density: the urban legacy of failed apartment tenement blocks dominates the small town imagination. Source: April 1972 demolition of Pruitt Igoe, wikipedia

## Envisioning Compact Dwellings

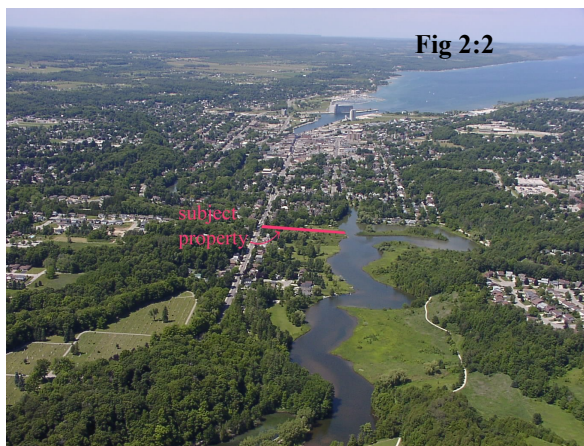
In response to the specific directives found both within the PPS and within Owen Sound's OP, a small residential intensification project was designed and an application made for site plan approval. The action research method permitted a first hand exploration of the current regulatory and economic opportunities which may enable compact infill development in existing neighbourhoods, as well as the numerous barriers encountered which ultimately prevented the compact design, multi-family affordable apartments from being built.

An opportunity for private developers to build new affordable housing was announced as a part of stimulus funding initiative in 2009 and early 2010 through the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (AHP). In response to an economic recession, the provincial and federal government teamed up to offer capital grants of up to \$120,000 per dwelling to those willing to build new rental apartments. Open to non-profit or for-profit developers, it was hoped that the program would "lead to the creation of new affordable rental housing units, with a specific focus on housing for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities." (AHP 2009). The builder's obligation was to maintain rents at affordable rent levels (80% of market value) for at least 20 years. Applications for funding were channelled through the Grey County government who currently manage affordable housing and social housing programs in the area.

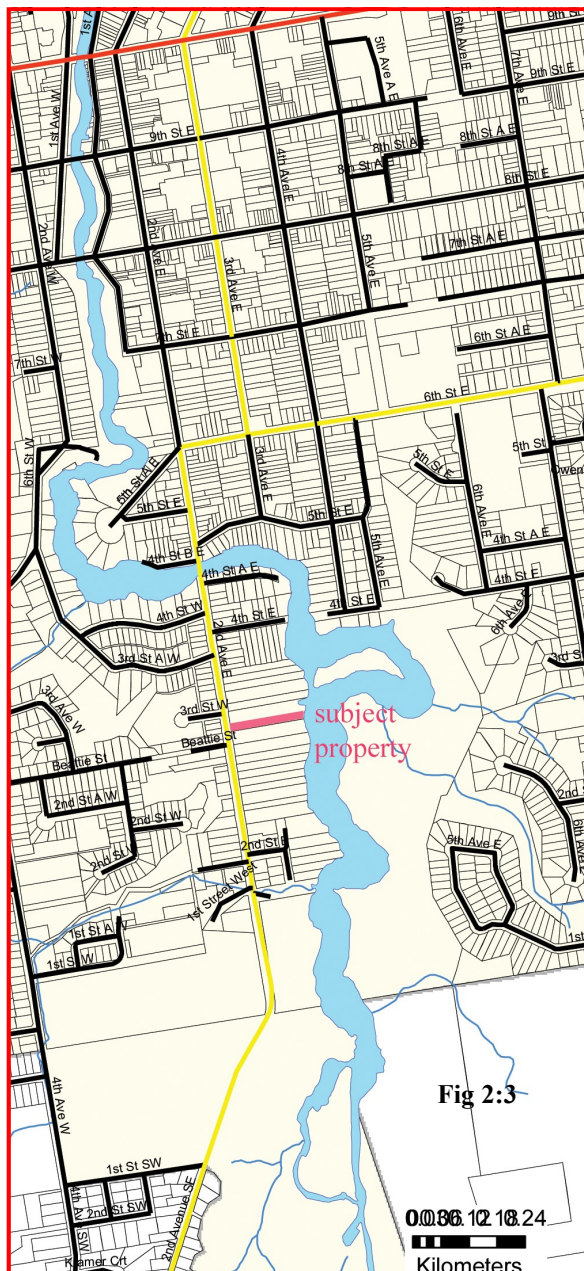
In a highly desirable single-family neighbourhood in the East Bay, a designer integrated small, six to eight unit apartment buildings at each street corner. Slightly bulkier than adjacent houses, they are small and unobtrusive and fit into the overall character of the neighbourhood. Usually, rental apartments would have been segregated into a large complex with fewer amenities and more liabilities than the single-family neighbourhood. The integration provides renters access to public facilities and enhances cross-class interactions... The secret seems to be small projects that are so well designed that they serve the needs of the users yet add architectural value to the surrounding community. The high quality layouts and design elements overcame the usual resistance to higher-density and lower-income residents. Such inclusive design actions require answers to difficult questions. How can land uses that segregate and discriminate be creatively integrated? How can design for poorer citizens be of high enough quality to overcome prejudice? How can activity settings for excluded people be included? Advocates for low-income housing often spend all their energy organizing and ignore design. Both are essential.

CMHC Research Highlight, *Impacts of the Aging of the Canadian Population on Housing and Communities* (2008)





**Fig 2:2**



**Fig 2:3**

**Fig 2:2:** Site noted on aerial photo of Owen Sound. (photo: C. Hempel)

**Fig 2:3** Location of property on planning maps . Source: Grey County GIS.

In response to the AHP, I submitted an Expression of Intent to Grey County in June of 2009 for the development of a vacant lot adjacent to her own home. The application was for the construction of a small affordable housing apartment building, to stand as an example of inclusive planning and compact form in a zone restricted to single family dwellings.

The county housing manager was supportive of the project concept, as the site seemed ideal for affordable housing. The infill lot is located on a bus route, close to the core of the city, and the property has established gardens and lovely views. An acceptable business plan, site plan and environmental site assessment (if required) had to be prepared before an application could be submitted through the AHP process. Three deadlines for submission of application were established by the province, September 1 and December 1 in 2009 and February 2 in 2010.

There are time and expenses involved in preparing these elements, especially with the strict time frames, and it was unknown at the time what the likelihood of full project funding would be. Such expenses are a barrier to exploring the potential for infill projects, but seeding funding through CMHC allowed for completion of the application. Grants can be obtained to cover expenses such as the development of a business plan, site plan, and other expenses such as legal or financial consultations, and the various fees paid to municipalities as part of the site plan approval process. Without this \$10,000 grant, designing the project, developing a business plan, and challenging existing zoning ordinances would have been too risky to make business sense. The waiting list for seed funding is often long and obtaining funds in time to take advantage of tight deadlines is difficult, but the seed funding program worked in this case.

### 3.3 Managing Growth

**3.3.2.3.** Accommodate the population and development anticipated for the city in the planning period in a sustainable and compact form.

**3.3.2.6.** Accommodate and encourage a broad range and mix of housing in terms of dwelling types, densities, tenure and cost for a diverse community

### 3.5 Equity, Diversity and Accessibility

**3.5.2.5** Recognize the demographic changes in the community and respond to the needs of an aging population

**3.5.2.7.** Provide and maintain a full range of housing, in terms of form, tenure and affordability, across the City's neighbourhoods to meet current and future needs of residents.

(Owen Sound Official Plan, 2006)

#### 6.1 PERMITTED USES IN RESIDENTIAL ZONES

**Fig. 2:4**

Within any Residential Zone, no person shall use any lot or erect, alter or use any building or structure for any purpose except one or more of the following uses:

Uses	Uses Permitted In Zone					
	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	MR
<b>RESIDENTIAL</b>						
Dwelling, Single Detached	●	●	●	●	●	
Dwelling, Semi Detached		●	●	●	●	
Dwelling, Duplex			●	●	●	
Dwelling, Townhouse				●	●	●
Dwelling, Converted				●	●	●
Dwelling, Apartment					●	●
Dwelling Units in Combination with a Non-Residential Use						●
Bed & Breakfast House					●	●
Boarding or Lodging House (see Section 5.17.10)					●	●
Accessory Apartment		●	●	●	●	●

**Fig 2:4** New zoning by-law indicates what is be permitted in R2 zones. Source: City of Owen Sound

## Understanding Municipal Objectives

The AHP program required projects to be 'shovel ready', and the County Manager and Seed Funding administrator stipulated that zoning be already in place. The R-2 zoning suggested for this neighbourhood in the draft of the City of Owen Sound's zoning by-law was accepted as the 'current' status, as it was likely to be adopted in the new year and prior to commencement of any building. The property could accommodate two building lots for semi-detached houses in addition to the existing lot and dwelling.

As Owen Sound's Official Plan states that "an accessory apartment shall be defined as a separate dwelling unit containing a bathroom and cooking facilities and contained within the structure of a single detached or semi-detached residential dwelling", it was believed that the new zoning would permit 4 dwelling units on this site without re-zoning or variances. However, building two separate semi-detaches homes would be far less efficient than building a single building with the same number of units. Duplication of heating system, servicing, front entry doors and stairs made this a poor choice for design

Despite OP objectives to provide smaller,

affordable and efficient units, the large single family house is the predominant form of house in most neighbourhoods and small rental units are very scarce. Apartment dwellings are permitted only in R4, R5 and MR zones. This is a barrier to providing more housing units, especially as smaller units are typically built as multiple dwellings. In many zones across the city rental units are scarce and restrictive zoning covenants prevent builders from following the OP mandate to provide a broad mix of form, tenure and cost "across the City's neighbourhoods".

This application proposed a multi-family apartment dwelling, intended to be one of those "small projects that are so well designed that they serve the needs of the users yet add architectural value to the surrounding community" (CMHC 2008) The vacant property in the heart of an established single family zone could support intensification, and a building could provide a model for future infill development, challenging the zoning by-law but working within the framework of the OP mandate and the PPS.



### 3.6 Urban Design

**3.6.2.4** Provide a pedestrian environment that is safe, comfortable, accessible, aesthetically pleasing and diverse

**3.6.2.6** Maintain residential areas that are safe, convenient, quiet, well landscaped, coherent in scale and accessible.

**3.6.2.7** Ensure that new development is aesthetically appropriate and compatible with the built heritage

(Owen Sound Official Plan, 2006)

There are many reasons that the proposed project rejected the typical single family dwelling model typical of the surrounding neighbourhood and proposed a multi-unit dwelling. Not only does the OP speak about demographic changes and the need to accommodate an aging population, there are next to no rental apartments in the neighbourhood. According to the *'Where's Home'* report from the Ontario Non-profit Housing Association (ONPHA, 2008) There is a current shortage of 1-bedroom units for seniors in Owen Sound. The AHP specified that 1-bedroom units were a funding priority, and dollars are allocated on the number of units provided, regardless of the number of bedrooms. A collection of smaller units on a single property would make the best business case. To an extent, these limitations as well as an evaluation of the scale and massing of nearby single family houses and duplexes led to the eventual form of the building proposed.

A compact development which looked to future needs of residents while maintaining compatibility with the existing single family homes presented a design challenge. Most homes in the area are between 1400 and 2000 square feet, in addition to several which were considerably larger. Several homes adjacent to the proposed development have finished walk-out basements due to sloping topography, suggesting the design of a similar form for the proposed dwelling.

Size limits on apartments were set by the AHP program: 1-bedroom units may be no larger than 60.4 square meters, so a four-unit building with a floor plate of 1350 square feet and a finished walk-out basement would provide a compatible building size.



**Fig 2:5:** Single family houses in the neighbourhood (photos by C. Hempel)



Fig 2:6

Although the neighboring Victorian house to the north (Fig 2:6: centre house) of the proposed development was built in 1895, it is not currently listed on the Heritage Register of the City of Owen Sound. However, the new house proposed aims to fit in with the design sensibilities, building materials, scale and character of both the 2 ½ storey century home to the north (currently owned by the developer) and the smaller single and 2 storey residential homes on the street (Fig 2:5). Meeting zoning criteria for parking while respecting the heritage elements, although not strictly required, were objectives of the site design. Two parking spaces were sited on the lot to the north, which was deemed acceptable to city planners if a land leasing agreement could be provided. As the property is also owned by the proponent, it seemed a viable solution. A circular driveway was proposed allowing an additional space, and two spaces were proposed in the front and side yard of the new dwelling in a similar

form to neighbouring houses. Although the side yards of these two properties could accommodate 7 vehicles, the proposed parking layout retained more trees and seemed appropriate for the architecture. Parking in the rear yard would not be compatible with the landscape of the rear yards, an item in which the author, neighbours and the planners agreed upon.

Parking proves to be a challenge in almost any intensification scheme, especially where planning regulations are inflexibly interpreted. The by-law requests 1.25 spaces per unit for multi-family dwellings, and only one space for a single family dwelling. There may however be several licensed drivers in any large home there may be no drivers in a small 4-unit apartment for low-income seniors. Rigid parking regulations prove a continuing obstacle to infill development

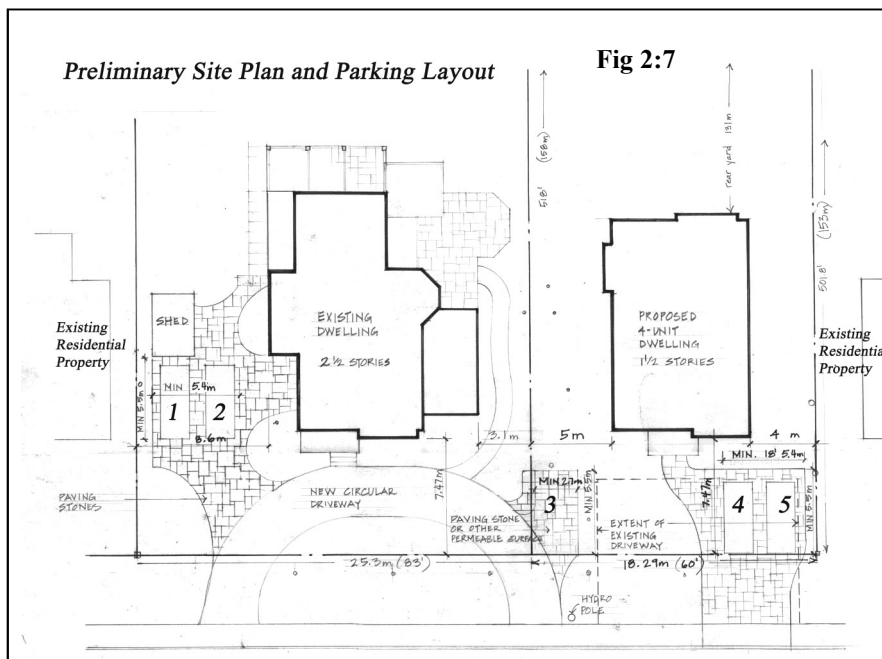


Fig 2:7

Fig 2:6 Illustration of front streetscape (C. Hempel)

Fig 2:7 Preliminary parking plan shows 3 spaces on new development, and two spaces located on neighbouring property (C Hempel)



Figure 2:8 (below) shows the preliminary building design that was provided to the county and CMHC. The 1 1/2 storey building has a walk-out basement in the rear yard, accommodating two apartments on each floor and is designed to resemble some of the smaller single family houses nearby, and although much smaller, is respectful of the architecture of the Victorian home adjacent to the property. Although not barrier-free, all units had separate garden areas, and shared use of the very large rear yard and garden. To encourage diversity within the building itself, two of the units would be designated for seniors, and the other two for other low-income adults or perhaps college students. Efficient use of shared living/dining areas with minimal circulation space allowed compact but functional designs.

The schematic concept was acceptable both to the County, who administered the AHP and

CMHC, who approved all stages of the project development as stipulated in the seed funding arrangement. A business plan was developed by Tim Welch consultants, incorporating construction cost estimates obtained from two reputable local builders, servicing and development costs, with reasonable allowances for professional fees, landscaping and contingencies.

Although not requested by municipal planners as part of their decision making process, CMHC was interested in the past experience and proven capabilities of the developer. The author and her husband have purchased, developed and renovated 10 properties in the Owen Sound area over the past 15 years, winning several awards for quality renovations and energy efficiency improvements. They have experience as landlords, and have created and maintained apartments for low income tenants including seniors. A good rela-



**Fig 2:8** Project Concept. Clockwise from top left: site Plan, Elevations, front elevation in context, main floor plan and basement plan (C Hempel).

## 1.1 Managing and Directing Land Use to Achieve Efficient Development and Land Use Patterns

### 1.1.1 Healthy, liveable and safe communities are sustained by:

- a. promoting efficient development and land use patterns which sustain the financial well-being of the Province and municipalities over the long term;
- b. accommodating an appropriate range and mix of residential, employment (including industrial, commercial and institutional uses), recreational and open space uses to meet long-term needs;
- c. avoiding development and land use patterns which may cause environmental or public health and safety concerns;
- d. avoiding development and land use patterns that would prevent the efficient expansion of *settlement areas* in those areas which are adjacent or close to *settlement areas*;
- e. promoting cost-effective development standards to minimize land consumption and servicing costs;
- f. improving accessibility for persons with disabilities and the elderly by removing and/or preventing land use barriers which restrict their full participation in society; and
- g. ensuring that necessary *infrastructure* and public *service facilities* are or will be available to meet current and projected needs.

## 1.4 Housing

### 1.4.3 Planning authorities shall provide for an appropriate range of housing types and densities to meet projected requirements of current and future residents of the *regional market area* by:

- a. establishing and implementing minimum targets for the provision of housing which is *affordable to low and moderate income households*. However, where planning is conducted by an upper-tier municipality, the upper-tier municipality in consultation with the lower-tier municipalities may identify a higher target(s) which shall represent the minimum target(s) for these lower-tier municipalities;
- b. permitting and facilitating:
  1. all forms of housing required to meet the social, health and well-being requirements of current and future residents, including *special needs* requirements; and
  2. all forms of *residential intensification* and *redevelopment* in accordance with policy 1.1.3.3;
- c. directing the development of new housing towards locations where appropriate levels of *infrastructure* and *public service facilities* are or will be available to support current and projected needs;
- d. promoting densities for new housing which efficiently use land, resources, *infrastructure* and *public service facilities*, and support the use of alternative transportation modes and public transit in areas where it exists or is to be developed; and
- e. Establishing development standards for *residential intensification*, *redevelopment* and new residential development which minimize the cost of housing and facilitate compact form, while maintaining appropriate levels of public health and safety.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
*Provincial Policy Statement, 2005*

## Making a Case for Re-zoning

Provincial policy objectives underline the need for utilizing existing serviced areas, an objective echoed in the OP. City planners requested a planning report outlining project compatibility with the PPStatement. Located within a designated settlement area of Owen Sound, municipal water, sanitary sewers and all other services are available, and as new connections are paid for by the developer, the city would bear no servicing burden. The property is within one kilometer of the downtown, which houses not only the commercial core, but public buildings such as the library, market, City Hall, and the commercial core area of the downtown. The site is also within one kilometer of Harrison Park, a large civic park connected to hiking trails and the natural recreation areas and open space of the Niagara Escarpment.

This particular site is unique in the capacity for intensification of use within the existing urban area, because the lot is unusually deep, with the Sydenham River at the end of the lot and long views over parkland. It is difficult to imagine a vacant lot more suited to intensification as described by the OP and the PPS, and a planning report was produced which outlined the design response to those policies.

Other agencies which were requested to respond to the preliminary application submitted no objections, including the County of Grey, Owen Sound Fire and Emergency Services, the Niagara Escarpment Commission and the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority. The Public Health Unit submitted a letter of support for the project, quoting relevant sections of the PPS that pertain to intensification and the provision of housing.



Fig 2:9



## 2.1 Natural Heritage

**2.1.1** Natural features and areas shall be protected for the long term.

**2.1.2** The diversity and connectivity of natural features in an area, and the long-term *ecological function* and biodiversity of *natural heritage systems*, should be maintained, restored or, where possible, improved, recognizing linkages between and among *natural heritage features and areas*, *surface water features* and *ground water features*.

**2.1.5** *Development and site alteration* shall not be permitted in *fish habitat* except in accordance with *provincial and federal requirements*.

**2.1.6** *Development and site alteration* shall not be permitted on *adjacent lands* to the *natural heritage features and areas* identified in policies 2.1.3, 2.1.4 and 2.1.5 unless the *ecological function* of the *adjacent lands* has been evaluated and it has been demonstrated that there will be no *negative impacts* on the natural features or on their *ecological functions*.

Mitigative measures and/or alternative development approaches may be required in order to conserve the *heritage attributes* of the *protected heritage property* affected by the *adjacent development or site alteration*.

*Provincial Policy Statement 2005*

Fig 2:9 Photo of back yard view

Fig 2:10 Site plan shows location of hazard line in relation to street and existing house

Fig 2:11 Illustration showing retained street trees (C Hempel)

A portion of the rear yard falls in the flood plain of the river, and impact on such hazard lands and other natural heritage features was assessed. The footprint of the building (under 1400 s.f.) is small in comparison to the entire property. There is sufficient land for complete drainage of storm water on site. Disruption during the construction process was expected to be minimal, with no excavated fill expected to remain on site. The soils are sandy well drained, and drainage is not expected to reach any of the natural wetland of the river system hazard area. The construction work for this project would not involve equipment in the hazard land area, and effects to the landscape should be negligible and disruption consistent with any urban infill project of a similar size. A drainage and storm water management plan and tree retention plan would be submitted also at the time of site plan approval, but city planners and the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority agreed that the preliminary design of the proposed project would have no significant impact on ecological function on the hazard area mapped by the region's Conservation Authority. As the development called for the removal of only one tree in an existing side yard, the proposal would also have little impact on the system of street trees established on the property.

Fig 2:11



Fig 2:10

## Public Reaction to the Proposal

In preliminary meetings, city planners remained neutral about how they felt about the project concept, and indicated that much hinged on the public meeting, which was held on March 29, 2010. Many neighbours came to the meeting to protest the re-zoning, expressing a variety of concerns about the project. Their comments at the meeting, in letters and in personal conversations allowed firsthand insight into some of the obstacles to intensification which is dedicated to affordable housing and multi-unit dwelling. Comments from 6 neighbours who either gave testimony at the meeting or spoke with me in casual conversation provide an overview of the concerns.

### Neighbour #1: "Tenants are Transient"

One next-door neighbour spoke at the public meeting about the quality of area, the beauty of the fenceless back yards and the wish to keep the neighbourhood just as it is. Although the site plan indicated no parking in the back yards, it remained the focus of this objection. However he also described the typical tenants as 'transient' and careless about their landscaping. His testimony is recorded as "a multi-unit residential dwelling is not conducive to the neighbourhood settings and the natural setting at the rear of the properties".

In private conversations Neighbour #1 admitted that the design seemed appropriate, but also stated that he and his wife were considering selling their property in the next couple of years and were concerned about resale value of a house located next to an apartment building. When asked if he would object to a single family dwelling next door he replied that since it would conform to current zoning regulations, he would have no opportunity to object. His fears were centred on the perception of future purchasers and that an affordable housing project next door would diminish the value of his home. Interestingly, he made no negative comments about the design, massing, siting or appropriateness of the architecture or the proposed land-

scaping and parking layout. When it was explained that two very large semi-detached affordable houses could be built immediately, much closer to his lot line, with four parking spaces, high fences, and many transient tenants, he made no comment. A legal building would allow no real opportunity for neighbours to protest.

The author has good relations with this neighbour, he is aware of the efforts that have gone into designs and renovations on the property over the years and probably gauged the alternative proposal (large footprint duplex) as unlikely.

It needs to be remembered that it is acceptable to express concerns about 'transient' tenants and 'careless landscaping' at the public meetings but less so to raise the more self-serving motivation of protecting property values. This attitude is perhaps understandable, as property values are typically decreased when located next to visible multi-unit dwellings.

### Neighbour #2: "What you are doing is good work"

The second next-door neighbour refused to join the group of protesters who had formed an opposition group, although they did not express public support either. They were not interested in becoming involved, but spoke in private about how their aunt lived in subsidized housing, and they did not believe that low income tenants should live in segregated zones in the city. Although potentially affected by the addition of a new driveway next to their property, these people refused to be swayed by fears about property values. This was the only neighbour who supported the values expressed in the city's official plan about welcoming diversity in all neighbourhoods.

### Neighbour #3: "We want children, not seniors"

An elderly neighbour, friendly with the author, did not speak at the public meeting, but signed the list of neighbours objecting to the change. He claimed that when he first heard that there might be a 4 unit apartment building in the neighbourhood,

he envisioned a ‘large, boxy thing’. He was not troubled by the external appearance or scale of the proposed building, yet claimed to be very concerned about the front yard becoming a sea of paving. The parking plan as designed was not what he had imagined, and seemed acceptable to him.

After the project was turned down, he spoke further about his concerns. He and his wife are hoping to keep the ‘single family’ designation to encourage more children in the neighbourhood. Another complaint about living on the street was that the cars travel too fast, and if there were more children and families, ‘perhaps the cars will slow down’. He had no objection to low-income neighbours, joking that he and his wife would likely be eligible. The dedication half of the apartment units for seniors was troubling to him. Although it was pointed out that many of the owners of single dwellings on the street were senior citizens, and a new single family dwelling did not guarantee children, it was agreed that the liveliness of a diverse community was a worthy goal. It seems that his kind spirited desire for diversity in the neighbourhood when apartments are earmarked for seniors was singular. Mixed age groups in a neighbourhood is certainly a challenge with an aging population.

#### Neighbour #4: “NIMBY is a Derogatory Term”

Neighbour #4 spoke on behalf of a group of neighbours who were opposed and summarized the main concerns of the group. She commented that tax dollars already support affordable housing projects in town, supported by the County. Although claiming the objections were not in the category of NIMBYism, and expressed support for affordable housing, she stated that this was an inappropriate zone for rental housing, that there were other places in the city more suitable.

Furthermore, she claimed (correctly as far as zoning is concerned, but incorrectly if the project is part of any AHP funding) that two of the units could not be assuredly dedicated to seniors, or low-income people at all. As Neighbour #4 previously owned an apartment building in the downtown core

and rented to low income tenants, she may have had personal experience with tenants who were troublesome, and who she would not desire to have as neighbours.

While granted some tenants may be problematic, that is not typically the case as demonstrated by Carole Land. A spry 67-year old senior (and an hopeful a future tenant of the proposed development), she spoke at the public meeting in favour of the proposal. Well integrated in the community, this low-income citizen has been on the county’s official waiting list for an affordable apartment for three years. In a small town, many citizens know each other, and the Neighbour #4 knew Ms Land well, embracing her with a hug at the beginning of the meeting. Friendly gestures did not dissuade Neighbour #4 from telling council that ‘suitable zones were established elsewhere’ for such tenants.



**Fig 2:12** Carole Land, low income senior, and potential tenant (C. Hempel)





**Fig 2:13** photo of poorly managed duplex in neighbourhood in state of disrepair (C. Hempel)

*“That place needs a match.”*  
Public Comments, March 20, 2010 .

#### Neighbour #5— “A Bad Precedent”

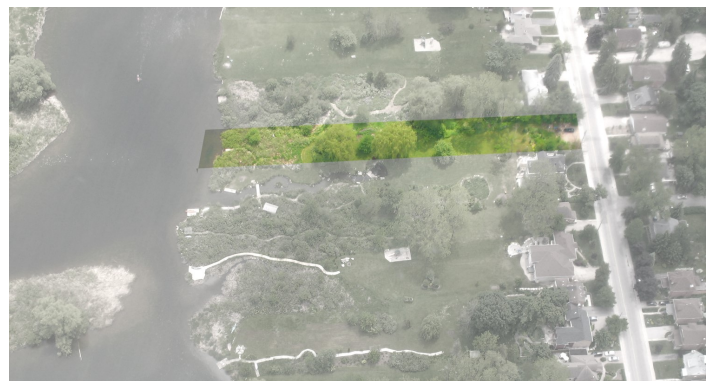
The legacy of badly maintained multi-family dwellings provides the most significant obstacle to the introduction of new dwelling forms. Resistance to intensification in the form of multi-family dwellings is the by product. The testimony of Neighbour #5 sums up the concerns of many. He expressed fears that any re-zoning would set a precedent for change, and his concern was recorded as a “change in zoning could creep further into the neighbourhood”. He spoke about an unattractive duplex across the road rented by careless tenants. In the previous summer there was a fire at that dwelling. Fire department personnel had trouble convincing all of the tenants to leave the building but when they did, it appeared that as many as 9 people were resident in one unit.

It was argued that the property under application is unique, larger than any other vacant lots in the vicinity, and this application was for site-specific rezoning. Neighbour #5 is a well respected lawyer and his passionate fear that a small change would in time lead to tenement style housing appeared to influence the attentive councilors (several of whom live in the area). Once again, he had no specific objections to the proposed design, and did state emphatically that “affordable housing is a real problem” but I assume he expected the problem to be addressed elsewhere in

town.

#### Neighbour #6— “This property could support more”

Several citizens spoke at the public meeting in favour of the development; one is a neighbour and the other two are interested in progressive planning and frequently speak on behalf on intensification and sustainable practices. It was pointed out the design was in keeping with the surroundings, and the new building would increase the local tax base. Objectives for intensification in both the OP and PPS were cited, adding that the property is generous, beautiful, and could surely support a few additional people. They brought up past projects completed by the proponent, which were well received by neighbours and which all led to increased assessment. They countered the NIMBY arguments forwarded by other neighbours, and challenged the decision-makers to think about creative ways to foster inclusive and progressive housing development.



**Fig 2:14** Aerial photo with proposed building lot highlighted. The lot is 500’ feet deep. (photo: C Hempel)

*“Wouldn’t it be nice if more people could use that beautiful, large yard?”*  
Public Comments, March 29, 2010

## Public Perceptions

Down the street there is a 5-plex which is frequently rented to low-income tenants, and causes much angst among neighbours. With vocal rotweilers occasionally chained to the front fire escape, and tenants who do seem transient and certainly do no gardening, resentment from surrounding neighbour is understandable. However, there are also a number of non-conforming and 'hidden' multi-family dwellings which nobody objects to or even knows about. Curiously, one of the most strenuous objections about the duplex (Fig 2:13) came from a citizen who previously had a secondary apartment in his own home, in violation of the previous zoning. The legacy of unsightly apartment blocks prevents the public from embracing apartment dwellings while often well cared for multi-family housing is integrated and goes unnoticed, while not formally endorsed.

Supportive social housing, and some of the problems associated with social support such as drug problems or mental disability, is considered synonymous with affordable housing and unwelcome in single family neighbourhoods. Many people who object to affordable housing are themselves in an income bracket that would make them eligible for the same reduced rents. The average income level in Owen Sound is \$27,000 and the income ceiling for a single individual to be eligible for affordable housing programs is \$26,000.

Home ownership is within reach of many citizens in rural communities, and people do not generally see themselves in the same situation as those wishing for smaller, less expensive rental

units or maintenance-free living. Thinking about the future needs of residents was not of interest to many neighbours. They were naturally protecting their own present interests and low income renters were seen as potentially problematic and therefore unwelcome. What remains unknown is what neighbour reaction would be to a proposal for an upscale multi-unit rental building, or a condominium fourplex.

The word 'apartment building' strikes fear into most hearts and visions of a crumbling Pruitt Igoe cause angst. Owen Sound has no Kitsilano to provide a positive reference of multi-family buildings in the shape of houses, well landscaped, cheerful, and holding their value. It is perhaps not surprising then that the intent of the OP - to encourage intensification and diversity of form and tenure - is not currently endorsed by neighbours.

Interestingly, the arguments laid out by authoritative and articulate NIMBYs may be a stronger obstacle to intensification in established or upscale neighbourhoods than in poorer ones. The red flag of "precedent" is emphatically waved, and it is persuasively asserted that 'something needs to be done about affordable housing, but not this!' They speak convincingly (but incorrectly) about planning policies, and councilors appear more likely to be influenced by these powerful citizens.



**Fig 2:15** multi-family houses in the neighbourhood which blend in and have few troubles integrating home owners with tenants. (Photos: C Hempel)



## Fire Escapes and Other Blights

For some reason we watched a bit of the old West Side Story musical last week – heaven knows why, it was dreadful. The only interesting part for me was prominence of fire escapes, and the reminder that in huge urban housing projects, they play an important role. In that staged setting they were almost romantic; the contrasting patterns of metal can double as a gritty social space. In small Ontario cities, nothing ruins the look of a lovely old home like a big metal contraption clinging to the brickwork.

Our house had one when we moved in. It served as a children's orphanage and group home for 80 years and although there were no fires, I wonder how many broken arms and furtive late night explorations that fire escape facilitated during its tenure. The house had a bit of a haunted quality at first, and the gnarly black staircase looked scary. We finally settled on a crane as the easiest way to get the damn thing off. The brickwork is still stained from all those years of rust. Although there's a lot of work yet to be done our Victorian house looked immediately better without the fire escape.

I doubt the original architect of the house would have permitted such an ugly appendage on the exterior. It's one of my architectural pet peeves. Ugly elements like fire escapes often become front yard garbage storage zones, or worse, places to tie up dogs. As you wander through the fine old neighbourhoods of our city the houses that have been badly modified or poorly maintained over the years stand out like sore thumbs (yes, I know, pot calling the kettle black, our old railings needs replacement and we'll get to it...). When landowners create apartments that turn lovely old houses into shoddy places, neighbours become understandably cranky. In the future, as our population ages and we try to live in a more compact, sustainable way, many of our big homes that were designed for large single families may become subdivided into smaller units. If this kind of retrofit is done sensitively, as it has been done in Toronto's beaches area or in Vancouver's beloved Kitsilano neighbourhood, more vibrancy can be created while rejuvenating and adapting buildings to current needs.

Fire escapes are especially silly because nobody likes the like the sight of them, they are expensive for builders to install, and there are many design alternatives. They are sometimes required because according to the building code, in an emergency people should not have to travel more than one flight of stairs before reaching an exterior exit. For some reason, in a single family house, it is assumed that travel between the third floor and the first floor in a fire is not as complex because the house is well known to all occupants, (the logic of this has always puzzled me a bit). There are better ways to provide fire safety that are less obtrusive.

If occupants of the third floor can reach a second floor exterior balcony, this is considered a suitable refuge from fire. A small balcony off the second floor could be attractive, and much less expensive. Or the door to the third floor could be located on the second floor. Better yet, if the third floor space is part of the second floor apartment and considered the same rental unit, no fire escape is necessary at all as it would be considered a single flight from the upper unit to the ground. My favourite design alteration

for typical Owen Sound 2 ½ storey houses is to remove a quarter of the third floor space above a large second floor apartment. This creates a large, airy loft which sounds difficult but is worth the effort on a modern renovation.

A few other considerations can keep the integrity when renovating an older building. Generous masonry openings should never be replaced with tiny windows and plywood filler, and front yards should maintain decent landscaping. We need more apartments in Owen Sound, across a diverse range of neighbourhoods and not just in the downtown or 'high density' areas, and if they are done well they fit in just fine. When citizens complain to the city about the sad state of multi-unit dwellings, officials often react by simply banning duplexes and triplexes altogether. This approach is not good for environmental, economic, or social reasons. Although a lack of rental units affects low income households the most, whether rich or poor, most of us will be trying to live a bit smaller in the coming decades. Current federal programs will even pay \$24,000 homeowners to add secondary apartments to their houses (go to CMHC.ca and search 'secondary suites' for more info) but to be eligible, properties must first comply with municipal zoning regulations.

Most cities are developing architectural design guidelines, especially for established neighbourhoods. Now as someone who has undertaken a few renovations over the years, I wouldn't advocate additional layers of bureaucracy. There are many permits and fees and hurdles as it is, I am not sure how you could adopt official design guidelines without making the process of upgrading and rejuvenating property even more difficult. But perhaps common sense regulation would go a long way to easing the tension between neighbours and those who would like to develop multi-unit dwellings. Wouldn't it be nice if a simple rule "No person shall turn a respectable building into an ugly one" could be a clause in our new zoning by-law?





## The Planning Report

The planner's report to city council is key to an application which challenges the status quo. Council members are reluctant to vote against a planner's recommendation. It seems a matter of course that neighbours will object to change, and council are aware of NIMBYism with respect to affordable housing. It seemed that the intentions as set forth in the Provincial Policy Statement and the city's own Official Plan were satisfied in this application, however the fear of change was not only stated by neighbours, but was reflected in the 40 page planning report. (Report from Community Planner (RCP), 2010)

In a summary of neighbours' concerns, planners suggested that the application might "put a stable community into transition" (ibid) and lead to more approvals for multiple unit dwellings in the neighbourhood. Comments in answer to the PPS state that "Intensification is further regulated by considerations of the City's Official Plan and although promoted, it is recognized that it may not be appropriate in every residential area..." (ibid) and further states that the new zoning by-law has selected areas for residential intensification. Specific suggestions of locations where a multi-family dwelling would be acceptable were listed, as multi-family housing is already located there. The areas suggested indicate planning support for segregation of housing form into distinct zones. Further comments include "when the PPS refers to a compact urban form and a mix of uses it does not necessarily mean that in every area there should be all forms of housing, but rather that throughout the City there should be a range of uses and densities." (ibid) This seems in contradiction to the OP and PPS mandate to encourage a broad mix of housing types

"across all neighbourhoods". The planning report claimed that the city has encouraged affordability, and it has provided assistance to the creation of 70 units since 2006. Since more than 700 people are on the waiting list for affordable housing in Grey County, a large jump since 2006, it is unclear why the city feels that it is doing an adequate job; fewer than 20 new units per year is not enough.

The city planners also cited density as a concern. Density in this case was calculated by the author to be below low density targets, however the area considered by planners in density calculations excluded land within the hazard area (see Fig 2:11) and was considered medium density. "The scale of development proposed would result in a gross residential density estimated at 29 units per hectare, which is more than three times the existing density of the 16 lots adjacent to the subject property on the east side of 2nd Avenue East". This was a curious calculation. The lot is very extensive, and paths, docks and outbuildings have existed within the hazard area for more than 100 years. It was obvious that the new building would be tiny relative to the overall lot size, and the planner's conclusions defied common sense and established usage. As the proposed dwelling is much smaller than most neighbouring structures, the word 'scale' is interpreted only in relation to number of units. Density calculations do not consider the square footage of a building, or the number of occupants, but only dwelling units.

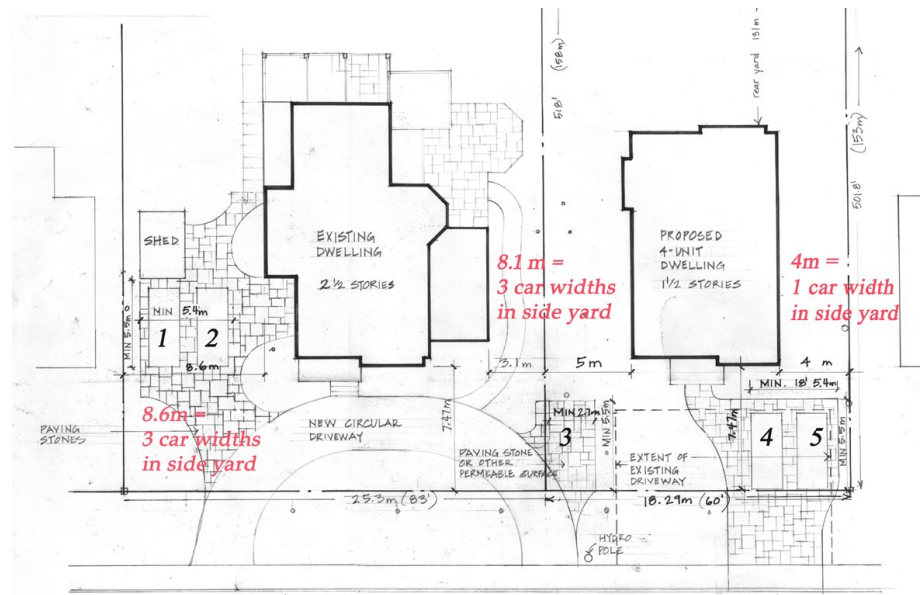
There are however many areas of the City where a multiple dwelling and the type of intensification proposed by a 4 unit multiple would be permitted. As noted in the previous technical report some residential zones that would permit a 4 unit multiple dwelling subject to site and building regulations and some examples of their locations include (but are not limited to):

- Residential 2-1 (1985-80) / R5 (2010-078)
  - Northwest side of Alpha Street between 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 11<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Residential 3-1 & Residential 3-2 (1985-80) / R5 (2010-078):
  - 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue East from just north of 16<sup>th</sup> Street East to 18<sup>th</sup> Street East
- Residential Special -1 (1985-80) / R5 (2010-078):
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue West between 8<sup>th</sup> Street West and 9<sup>th</sup> Street West.
- Residential Special - 2 (1985-80) / R5 (2010-078)
  - East side 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue East between 13<sup>th</sup> Street East and 14<sup>th</sup> Street East

**Fig 2:16** The distinct zones which planners deemed suitable for multi-unit rental buildings.

Source: Planning report for Hempel Application, City of Owen Sound.

**Fig 2:17** Parking plan submitted showing alternative locations for cars. The property contains 20.7 m of side yard, which is technically enough width for 7 vehicles (C Hempel)



Seemingly in contradiction to land density objections, the planner also commented that “The applicant has provided a conceptual design for a 4 unit multiple building. Although it would contain more units, the building appears smaller than many other homes along 2nd Avenue East that contain one or two dwellings. The very small size of the proposed units gives rise to further concern regarding the compatibility of the form of development proposed.”. The AHP design parameters limiting unit size are in agreement with directives in the PPS to maximize efficiency and minimize cost of housing. Embracing smallness is a key element to resilience (Hester, 2006) yet the 650 square foot apartments were of concern to Owen Sound planners.

Parking was again an issue for planners, and it was a challenge that had to be addressed in a creative design layout. The preliminary scheme as submitted was not acceptable due to the restrictions on circular driveways, and the engineering and planning department ruled that the proposition should be refused. The regulations about driveway widths and configurations were not explained to me, and although a number of alternatives could have been proposed as an alternative design. Planners did not discuss site plan alternatives with me at all. In fact the planning report was not released to me, but appeared on-line on the Friday before the Monday council meeting.

As Fig 2:17 indicates, there is adequate width in the existing side yards to accommodate as many

as 6 cars with only two driveway entrances. The fact that planners did not contact me to discuss alternative site plan arrangements is telling; this rezoning application is distinct from site plan approval and the width provided in side yards should have been adequate for re-zoning purposes. As the acreage of these two lots is more than .66 hectares, with more than 43 meters of frontage and currently contains only one house, it appears that planners were not interested in solutions to the parking plan.

A more telling element of the planning report was the omission of the letter of support offered by the Grey Bruce Health Unit. The planning report makes no mention of this document, summarizing comments by other agencies and stating clearly “There were no other comments”. Ironically, several days before the planning report was released, a “Healthy Communities” conference was hosted in Owen Sound. A joint venture between the city’s Planning Department and Public Health, optimism was expressed about future co-operation between these two regulatory agencies in building healthy, diverse, inclusive communities. The applicant asked in an e-mail that the Public Health letter be included prior to council’s decision, and suggested a deferral, but the request was denied by planners and by council.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Planners and politicians in Owen Sound, while expressing support in principle for the values articulated in the PPS, struggle to embrace policies in a practical way. While intensification might be well supported in zones which are already dense, even small, discreet projects which challenge the status quo are met with hostility. It was hoped that dwelling design which respects the established built character of the area would be welcome, and perhaps if the building were to proceed, it might be well received after it was occupied and new tenants were established. Provincial policy-makers would be wise to assume that change will be resisted not only by citizens, but by planners and politicians and firmer guidelines may be required. Such guidelines would also be helpful in application to the OMB. When considering the possibility of appealing this decision, there was no evidence that planners disobeyed the PPS.

If the Health Unit is to contribute to future planning, it should be required that their comments be included in staff reports to council regardless of whether the planners or politicians agree with them. Unquestioned by council, the omission of those comments at the very least suggests a degree of bias planners have when it comes to integration of low-income multi-family housing and speaks to a reluctance to adhere to the spirit and objectives of the PPS.

The definition of 'density' currently only includes the number of units. The number of bedrooms is an important factor when calculating density. On rural lots with septic beds, the number of bedrooms indicates the size of septic field, predicting the number of building occupants and therefore density. The building that was the subject of this application would likely house no more than 4-6 adults, and perhaps a baby. The single family house next door (the author's residence), more than twice the size, was originally built for a family of 11 but is calculated at 1/4 the density. Factoring in both number of bedrooms and overall square footage to density calculations would be more accurate and would have prevented planners from making the preposterous but legal assertion that a building

with a 1300 square foot floor plate was too dense for a lot larger than half an acre (.33 ha).

On this site, extensive gardens have been established in the flood plain for more than 100 years. It is the same topography as the nearby, very large Harrison Park, which is well landscaped and dotted with century old structures, roads, bridges, parking lots, and paths. The planners eliminated this land from density calculations, as directed by the new zoning by-law. Hazard lands which includes very steep slopes may not be usable for recreation or parking, so discounting this land might make sense for some hazard zones, but if intensification is a goal, land which is usable open space might be counted for density ratios. In Owen Sound's previous zoning by-law, hazard land in the flood plain was included in lot area calculations and in some circumstances could even be used for parking. The introduction of a clause in the PPS that defines two types of hazard land (1) that which can reasonably be used as garden space (although perhaps not for parking or built structures) and should be counted when calculating lot area, and (2) hazard land which is too steep or too low to walk on which should not.

Parking regulations interfere with attempts for intensification regularly. The same common sense that applies to density might apply for parking, and some factors could reduce required spaces. Low income tenants within 1 km of all services might not own cars, and might prefer to share a vehicle, especially seniors. A licensed architect working for a developer might have the good sense to design a suitable number of spaces based on the program of the building, and market needs rather than the dictates of planning. More will be discussed about the impediment of parking not only to affordability of housing but to density and quality of design in Chapter 5.



*Until about 50 years ago, most Americans grew up in communities where people from all walks of local life, although separated by race and class, lived within walking distance of others. One was likely to personally know people from a wide range of professions and ages. Because of personal associations, the disparate groups could work together, when necessary, to address civic issues. Heterogeneous form facilitated this and can again if city design makes inclusivity and heterogeneity desirable, valuable and prestigious.*

Randolf Hester, *Design for Ecological Democracy* (2006)

It would help advocates for inclusivity if the PPS defined the size and scale of ‘neighbourhood’ in small cities and towns so that there is no wiggle room for leaders and planners who still wish to keep renters in segregated zones. If this was the case, this proposal might have passed or at least had clear grounds for an appeal with the OMB, as there are virtually no small apartments or rental units in the neighbourhood or within walking distance of Harrison Park. As it was, there was no measurable way to dispute the planners’ assertion that the existing zones are enough to provide a diversity of form and tenure, or challenge their definition of the entire city as ‘neighbourhood’.

Although few wealthy people are motivated to advocate for the convenience or richness that intergeneration and multiple priced housing brings to a neighbourhood (Hester, 2006) the PPS supports inclusive heterogeneity. If Owen Sound’s OP included ‘within walking distance’ in addition to ‘across the city’s neighbourhoods’, exclusive areas could be physically mapped and injustices in planning could be better identified.

In efforts to build strong communities that are healthy, livable and safe, and that meet the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing 2005 Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and The City of Owen Sound Official Plan (OP), the Health Unit offers the following comments.

1. The Grey Bruce Health Unit is of the opinion that redevelopment of the subject property and the proposed multiple residential unit appear to meet the PPS and OP by promoting and intensifying redevelopment, including utilizing suitable existing infrastructure and public service facilities required to meet public needs (PPS 1.1.3.3 and OP 3.3.2.7).
2. The development proposal appears to address OP 3.5.2.7 and PPS 1.4.3 with respect to housing affordability across the City’s neighbourhoods to meet current and future needs of residents
3. The subject lands are located on an existing Collector Road with existing sidewalks facilitating pedestrian travel (OP 6.1.3.4.6) with an existing City Transit bus route.

Please be advised that the Grey Bruce Health Unit has no objection to the proposed site plan.

**Fig. 2:18**

**Fig 2:18** Excerpt from letter of support from Grey Bruce Public Health Unit, and omitted in planning report. Source: City of Owen Sound, summary of pre-circulation comments

May 26, 2010

Fig. 2:19

Letter to the Editor and the City of Owen Sound:

We are writing this open letter to City Council to encourage our city to consider changes in the way it thinks about affordable housing and where affordable housing ought to be located. The members of the Grey Bruce Affordable Housing Coalition believe affordable housing belongs in every neighbourhood in Owen Sound, and that

everyone benefits when neighbourhoods are diverse and inclusive. It's time to move past myths and beliefs about people on fixed incomes and recognize stereotypes when they arise.

Including affordable housing in a neighbourhood does not mean the property will deteriorate, not be kept up, or change its 'character'. Low-income citizens, like most citizens, value safe, clean and quality housing and good relations with their neighbours. For these reasons we are disappointed that council did not support the Hempel's recent application for a zoning bylaw change to allow them to build a small affordable four plex housing unit that is desperately needed. Christy Hempel has been a member of the Affordable Housing Coalition since its inception and we have followed with interest her plans to pursue federal and provincial funding to build affordable housing in our community. We need the public and the private sector to step up to the plate if we are ever going to get new rental housing.

Cities like Kitchener, Woodstock and London are making affordable housing happen and are working closely with private developers, landlords and affordable housing advocates to make sure people have a quality place to live, regardless of their income. The new official plan for Owen Sound is a step in the right direction. Now we need council to take a step further and make affordable housing happen in all city neighbourhoods, and not be swayed by opinions that affordable housing 'belongs' in certain areas of the city, but not others. The city should not let parking continue to be an impediment to the development of affordable housing. We think that increasing density and diversity of housing options makes good sense and good housing design is critical to maintain the character of a neighbourhood.

It is important for private developers to get involved in small-scale affordable housing solutions and we worry that the city is signaling to people who care about making affordable housing a reality that it's not worth their while. Hopefully other private investors and developers will not be discouraged when applications like the Hempel's are denied with no discussion at the council table. There are many possibilities when people work together to make things happen. We urge city council to embrace that art of possibility.

Becki Knisley and Colleen Purdon  
Grey Bruce Affordable Housing Coalition  
Contact: Colleen Purdon (519) 376-7145 cpurdon@bmts.com

**Fig. 2:19** Letter sent to the editor of the *Owen Sound Sun Times* expressing frustration over the decision of city council to refuse the application for re-zoning.

Source: Colleen Purdon

The project introduced not only four-unit dwelling in a zone which legally permits only detached or semi-detached dwellings, but also introduced affordable housing where very little currently exists. One of the limitations of this experiment is that it is difficult to know if the same objections would be raised if only one change were introduced; would a multi-unit upscale condominium obtain approval? Would as many neighbours object if a semi-detached dwelling were built next door and dedicated to low income families? Without funding through provincial and Federal sources,

this building would not be economically viable. The program funded development on a per unit basis, and a two-unit dwelling would not have been feasible. Construction costs and development costs far outweigh the possible return on investment, and the land costs in a good area are higher than land elsewhere. Economic barriers to building quality housing in rural communities are currently staggering.

It is worth noting that in a small town setting, developers, NIMBYs and advocates for progressive planning are all likely to know or be friends with municipal leaders and planners. Decision-makers and planners are surely influenced by their own prejudices and those of their friends, particularly where there are too few staff and few

too developers to introduce objectivity. Planning laws must be designed to be somewhat bulletproof to withstand the pressures of personal biases. The best outcome would be for a clear and shared understanding of what will make a resilient, diverse and prosperous city.

### **Not in My Back Yard**

Well, our proposal to build affordable housing on the lot next to us has been refused. Since the project won't proceed, at least I can learn from it and write about the process.

We have considered options for the vacant lot next to our house since we moved in years ago. The original house sits lopsided on the north side of the large riverfront lot, and the vacant property on the south may have been the site of a stable. We are in no hurry, but building something there is a long term goal. A year ago we learned that with stimulus support, an Affordable Housing Program offered funding to public, non-profit or private for-profit developers to build apartments, and we wondered if we could build here. We could retain both parcels, while adding new units. Not a tremendous money maker, but a wonderful project for many reasons, and economically viable with financial support. CMHC has been trying to engage the private sector in partnerships so that counties do not bear the sole burden of providing affordable housing, especially small scale infill projects. They provided funds to cover costs for us to investigate the potential for our proposal (any developer can apply for this seed funding, go to the CMHC website or e-mail me for info [chempel@hempeldesigngroup.com](mailto:chempel@hempeldesigngroup.com)).

Last week I attended a "Healthy Communities" conference here in Owen Sound. I was happy to hear that Public Health and Planning had joined forces to put together an informative and engaging conference. Simple directives like 'foster active living through your support of pedestrian-oriented transportation' and 'support the development of attainable housing' were highlighted on the one page summary. The city should receive a gold star in some areas, such as 'ensure affordable access to recreation for all persons in the community regardless of income.'

So it was perplexing that only three days after the conference ended, I learned that the letter from Public Health which supported our small affordable housing proposal was not even mentioned in staff's planning report. I wonder how much collaboration between planning and Public Health will become a reality. I did notify council of this omission as soon as I read the report which was released last Friday, but the following Monday council quickly rejected our proposal to build a small 'apartment building' on the vacant lot next to our home, not one single question asked.

Our Official Plan describes our collective goals as a community. Many segments are applicable to this proposal, and were quoted in the report from Public Health, including "Provide and maintain a full range of housing, in terms of form, tenure and affordability, across the City's neighbourhoods to meet current and future needs of residents", "promoting and intensifying redevelopment, including utilizing suitable existing infrastructure" and "accommodate and encourage a broad range and mix of housing in terms of dwelling types, densities, tenure and cost for a diverse community."

The biggest threat communities now face is lack of density to support municipal services. Stopping sprawl is the first order of business, for environmental, economic and social reasons. Preservation of farmland and natural habitat is good. Infill development within towns and cities is good. Design which does not respect established built character or ecological systems is bad. These are primary principles of good sustainable design.



Neighbours came out to voice their opinion at the public meeting. The sentiment was that the single-family quality of the neighbourhood should remain as is. They want the city to keep multi-unit buildings in designated zones and out of this area, commenting that renters are transient and may not take good care of their properties. They acknowledged that “affordable housing is a real problem” but the consensus about this proposed mix of dwelling type was unapologetically “not in my back yard”. In the staff report, planners suggested other neighbourhoods in the city where such a building could go; districts where apartment dwellers would be welcome.

There was nothing personally unkind or unexpected in the opposition. More surprising was that our closest neighbour did not join the well organized group of protesters, and throughout the process I heard not one word of criticism about the building design. A worry expressed was that we might not build this as planned, but that we would simply sever a lot, and Barry’s Construction would snap up the property and build something horrible.

If I was a neighbour and an apartment building was proposed next door, I would be worried about exactly the same thing. There are some very ugly rental buildings in this area – not all landlords and tenants care for their properties. However, this issue is unrelated to zoning, which will allow two rental semi-detached homes anyways. The illustration shows what could legally be built here in complete conformi-

ty to zoning standards, no minor variances required. It’s ghastly, and we would never propose such a building, but another owner could.

Design problems don’t get solved with zoning, they get solved with good design. The legacy of poor rental unit construction has led us to perceptions that density is equated with ugliness. It’s high time we tackled this subject squarely.

There is really no hidden agenda! This project is my answer to the directives in our Official Plan, and we would have enjoyed building it. Our yard can surely support a few more people. More importantly, it might have been a good example of how we could begin building for a changing demographic while maintaining the quality of our streetscape. Don’t believe that this development was turned down because of parking, this lot is very roomy and there were many fine options. This proposal was turned down because no matter what the Official Plan Policy states, and no matter what new partnerships have been created with Public Health, there is currently no political will to encourage a broad range and mix of housing in terms of dwelling types, densities, tenure and cost for a diverse community.



*Proposed project:  
small building with  
four 1-bedroom  
apartments  
currently not  
permitted in  
R-2 zone*



*Example of  
design currently  
permitted  
in R-2 zones:*

*2 semi-detached  
dwellings*